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# The Weberian legacy: Re-reading Reinhard Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait* of Max Weber

Raymond Caldwell

## Abstract

Published more than 50 years ago, Reinhard Bendix's classic monograph *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (1960) exercised an important influence on the early reception of Weber's work in America. With the recent resurgence of interest in defining what constitutes 'the Weberian legacy', Bendix's work has taken on renewed significance in understanding why the reception process of translation, adaptation and assimilation in America produced conflicting interpretations of Weber's fragmented legacy. In the *Intellectual Portrait*, Bendix sought to provide a synthetic overview of Weber's oeuvre as a whole, effectively rebalancing the earlier interpretative focus on *The Protestant Ethic* and the studies of the world religions by giving equal weight to the analytical treatise of *Economy and Society*, which includes studies of economics, religion, politics, power, law and the state. In doing so, Bendix challenged Talcott Parsons' powerful alternative *theoretical* reading and helped extricate Weber's historical sociology from the claims of functionalism and modernisation theory. Despite this success, Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait* still exists under the shadow of Parsons' interpretative legacy, and his reading of Weber is often criticised or misrepresented, even by his admirers. For some, he was an 'instrumental Weberian' who exaggerated Weber's work on conflict and power, while for others he was a representative of 'cultural Weberianism' who focused on the autonomy of intellectual ideas and religious worldviews. In practice, Bendix, like Weber, can be adapted and assimilated into both readings. This essay reappraises the *Intellectual Portrait* as an important chapter in the intellectual history of Weber scholarship and interpretation. It seeks to re-evaluate Bendix as a Weber interpreter, as well as honour his status as a 'Weberian': a scholar who sought to reinterpret Weber's comparative historical sociology of the West from the viewpoint of multiple modernities. While Bendix deserves this re-evaluation, the essay concludes by suggesting a genealogical counterhistory that questions the narrative retelling of the emergence of 'the Weberian legacy' as a progressive or cumulative process leading to an internally coherent or broadly consistent research programme, method, perspective, paradigm or tradition.

## Keywords

Bendix, counterhistory, Parsons, the Weberian legacy

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## Introduction

Reinhard Bendix's classic book, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (1960), was one of the first studies to trace the outlines of Weber's historical sociology as a whole; for some scholars, it is 'unsurpassed' as a systematic guide to Weber's corpus (Kalberg, 1994: 16). Yet although Bendix's role as an 'expositor' has been recognised, his status as a Weber interpreter has been somewhat neglected, both within the larger American sociological academy and the various traditions of comparative historical sociology. There are various reasons for this neglect but perhaps the most significant is that Bendix's work was always overshadowed by the enormous influence Talcott Parsons exercised as translator, theorist and teacher on the initial reception of Weber's legacy in America (Scaff, 2011). Parsons' important translation of *The Protestant Ethic* (1930) was followed by his groundbreaking theoretical work, *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), which had four chapters dedicated to Weber. The publication of *The Social System* (1951) further assured Parsons' theoretical ascendancy and the creation of a 'Weber-Parsons tradition of social theory', which gradually 'assimilated' Weber's diverse writings on religion, capitalism and Western rationalism into the evolutionary premises of modernisation theory (Almond, 1956: 393, 2007: 76; Parsons 1963). Although initially extremely influential, Parsons' reading of Weber was to eventually inspire a relentless 'de-Parsonising of Weber' that was often polemically motivated (Cohen et al., 1975; Gerhardt, 2011; Owens, 2010). In contrast, Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait* provided one of the first serious attempts to extricate Weber's legacy from the systematic innovations of Parsons' theoretical synthesis. Its tone was scholarly, erudite and rarely polemical. His overall goal was to place Weber within the framework of a comparative historical sociology that eschewed all claims to grand theory. Bendix (1965b) also made it clear that he wanted to 'work along Weber's lines', rather than offer 'yet another interpretation' (p. 10).

The shadow cast by Parsons, Parsonism and its counter-reactions has undoubtedly impeded a broader critical appreciation of the significance of the *Intellectual Portrait* in the reception and interpretation of Weber's work (Caldwell, 2002). Jeffrey Alexander (1998) as an early defender of Parsons' sociology in a post-Parsonian era sought to position Bendix's work as a chapter in the 'anti-Parsonian reinterpretation of Weber' and the broader search for a theoretical alternative to grand theory that ended in the failed paradigm of 'conflict sociology' and the temporary revival of 'neo-functionalism' (p. 98). For Alexander (1983), Bendix was an early advocate of 'multidimensional Weberianism' who also became a representative of 'conflict theory' and 'instrumental Weberianism' by overstating the role of power and politics in Weber's work (pp. 131–133). Similarly, Collins (1998), in his advocacy of 'conflict sociology' as an alternative to functionalism, has credited Bendix with introducing Weber as 'above all a theorist of domination and conflict' who helped spark a revival of research on stratification and 'the historical transformation of the state' (p. 309). In this respect, Bendix was characterised as the 'figurehead for a movement that opened up the sociology of multidimensional conflict, of macrohistorical research, of the state as the leading edge of social change' (Collins, 1998: 302). From these opposing perspectives, conflict theory versus functionalism, the *Intellectual Portrait* is positioned as an anti-Parsonian attack on grand theory designed primarily to shift the interpretative focus from *The Protestant Ethic* and the studies of the world religions to the analytical treatise of *Economy and Society*, an analytical shift from worldviews and ideas to power and politics (Collins, 1998). Further reinforcing these views, Kalberg (1997) has suggested that Bendix 'exaggerated Weber's emphasis upon conflict, inequality, power and ruleship at the expense of the more "cultural Weber" of

*The Protestant Ethic*' (p. 210). Since so much of Weber's (1949) work affirmed the 'transcendental presupposition' of the 'cultural science', that we are 'cultural beings' in search of meaning, this would appear to constitute a very serious criticism (pp. 81, 110). But did Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait* really affirm Weber as 'a theorist of conflict', was he really an instrumental Weberian only concerned with power, conflict and coercion? And was he overly reliant on a one-sided reading of *Economy and Society*? Paradoxically, Parsons was one of the first reviewers of the *Intellectual Portrait* to recognise Bendix's cultural reading of Weber, and more recent evaluations also suggest that Bendix was a 'cultural Weberian' who recognised the strengths and limitations of 'instrumental Weberianism' (Caldwell, 2002; Kiser, 2005; Parsons, 1960; Scaff, 2014). Moreover, the idea that Bendix was an advocate of 'state-centred modernisation' seems increasingly untenable given his forceful critique of 'methodological nationalism': for Bendix, there is no singular ideal of 'political modernity' because it is a contingent outcome that cannot be identified with a universal, evolutionary or functionalist ideal of 'modern society' (Chernilo, 2007: 109–110).

This essay re-examines the scope and significance of Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait* of Weber's work by conceiving it as both a 'Weberian reading of Weber' (Ringer, 2004) and a valiant attempt to recover Weber's oeuvre as a whole – a perhaps almost impossible task given the scope, shifting intentions and incompleteness of Weber's work (Scaff, 2014: 2; Whimster, 2007: 9). If Parsons' classic 'theoretical' reading often seriously skewed his interpretation of Weber's oeuvre, then Bendix's painstaking strategy of systematic textual exposition and compression in the *Intellectual Portrait* was a search for greater thematic unity and interpretative authenticity (Roth, 1977b, 2007). By re-reading the *Intellectual Portrait* in these terms, what emerges is a comprehensive and classic interpretation of Weber as a comparative historical sociologist and one of the most balanced, incisive and well-argued criticisms of Parsons' alternative reading.

The essay begins by briefly exploring the 'genealogy' of the *Intellectual Portrait*; its contingent and temporal emergence out of Bendix's often submerged or 'shadow dialogue' with Parsons the 'absent interlocutor'; for Parsons often only becomes present in the real and imagined manifestations of his work: Parsonism, functionalism and modernisation theory. The primary objective is to explore this dialogue rather than provide a narrative account of the historical reception and disciplinary institutionalisation of Weber's work in America and Germany, or the emergence of a Weberian research paradigm or tradition; others have pursued those goals (Albert et al., 2003; Roth, 1977b; Scaff, 2006, 2014). Nor is it possible to provide a comprehensive survey of the *Intellectual Portrait* or its relation to Bendix's work as a whole. Moreover, within the confines of this essay, it is not possible to relate Bendix's work to its biographical context, institutional setting or the eclectic intellectual influences on his ideas – except incidentally (see *Biographical note* by Caldwell, 2002: 46–48; Roth, 2007). Instead, the interpretative task is to mirror the original integrated ambitions of Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait*, not by a systematic 'exposition' of the book, but by pursuing a *thematic re-reading* which demonstrates that Bendix succeeded in providing an alternative Weberian reading to that proposed by Parsons.

In the course of this thematic analysis, four main arguments are made. First, Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait* sought to extricate Weber's 'image of society' from the legacy of Parsons' functionalism and evolutionary theory and return it to a broader comparative historical understanding of the relationship between society *and* politics. Unlike most efforts to 'de-Parsonise' Weber, however, Bendix (1962) was not

motivated by a polemical intent, and his reading placed as much weight on Weber's sociology of religion as it did on his political sociology; effectively blending a 'cultural' and 'instrumental' reading of Weber (pp. 265, 474). This is one of the main reasons why the Weberian reading Bendix offers in the *Intellectual Portrait* is more subtle and complex than a political sociology of 'domination and conflict' might suggest (Alexander, 1983; Collins, 1998; Kiser, 2005). In effect, Bendix accepted Weber's 'transcendental presupposition' of the cultural sciences, along with his political realism. We are culture beings in search for meaning in a meaningless and ethically irrational universe, but this search for meaning as value choices does not rule out the 'objective' pursuit of rational scientific knowledge as a cultural value in a disenchanted world, even though this cultural value cannot be justified by science, with the result that politics and power have to arbitrate in practice between competing values, ethical ideals and political ends (Geuss, 2010).

Second, unlike Parsons who located Weber's intellectual legacy in a generally optimistic vision of modernity defined by moral progress and rationality, social order and liberal democracy, Bendix (1962) sought to demonstrate that Weber's analysis of Western modernity was deeply ambivalent and open-ended (p. 9). Bendix achieved this by reconstructing the dynamic of 'material and ideal interests' at the core of Weber's 'image of society'. In doing so, he replaced the all-encompassing Parsonian problem of social order with the dual problematic of 'society' and 'polity'. This amounted to the restoration of a forgotten Continental discourse on 'state' and 'society' that had been somewhat submerged in Parsons' later functionalist reading of Weber. The state-society relationship is always an historical eventuation rather than a functionally or normatively defined outcome. In this way, Bendix (1962) proposes a characteristically unresolved liberal discourse on democracy; the 'state' cannot impose political integration from above, while 'society' cannot generate normative social consensus from below (p. 478). This restoration of the historical problematic relationship between coercion and consensus, state and society resonates with Weber's anti-utopian realism (Geuss, 2010). It was also the key to Bendix's critique of 'methodological nationalism' (i.e. the conflation of society with the nation-state) that was to become a defining feature of his historical sociology (Bendix, 1964; Chernilo, 2007). **IAQ6I**

Third, although Bendix provides one of the first serious and sustained attempts to extricate Weber's legacy from the systematic innovations of Parsons' theoretical synthesis, he is not concerned with providing a *theoretical* alternative to functionalism. Bendix was always a reluctant Weberian, as some of former students can attest; and he was not an advocate of 'conflict theory' (Collins, 1998). Instead, his overall goal was to place Weber within the framework of an interpretative tradition of comparative historical sociology that constantly questions the grand theoretical claims of sociology over history, of society over culture (Bendix 1967). Unlike Parsons, who attacked the 'historicist' weakness of Weber's sociological enterprise by affirming Weber's apparent methodological intention to vindicate the universal applicability of 'general theoretical concepts' in sociology, Bendix (1962) treated Weber's method as primarily the retrospective interpretation of the historians' practice, and as such concerned with concepts of 'limited applicability' (pp. 268–281). With this reformulation, Bendix repositioned Weber as a comparative historian within a *Geisteswissenschaft* tradition of historical scholarship and research that affirmed the practical challenges of cultural-historical understanding, rather than the theoretical ambitions of sociology (Caldwell, 2002; Calhoun, 1996; Steinmetz, 2009).

Fourth, although Bendix claimed that he did not want to offer ‘yet another interpretation’, his *Intellectual Portrait* offers more than a systematic exposition of Weber’s substantive work (Bendix, 1962: 258, 1965b: 10). The act of capsulisation constituted a coherent and often persuasive reinterpretation of Weber as a comparative historical sociologist concerned with the paradoxes of ‘reason and freedom in the Western world’, and it was through this reading of Weber as a ‘liberal’ historicist and humanist that Bendix partly affirmed his own intellectual self-identity as a Weberian (1962: 9). For Bendix’s broader goal was to create a form of comparative historical sociology that could explore the unique realities of the Western experience of modernity in the light of the present challenges facing non-Western societies and cultures (Arnason, 2010). By ‘thinking with’ Weber, Bendix may not have discovered Weber’s ‘authorial intentions’, or the thematic unity of his oeuvre, but he had created an intellectual genealogy for his own work. In this sense, the *Intellectual Portrait* is not just an act of renewal in understanding Weber’s work, it is also a statement of Bendix’s own intellectual self-portrait as a comparative historian and a Weberian.

Finally, there is a broader purpose to this re-reading and reinstatement of Bendix’s Weber. The essay is a contribution to the understanding of ‘the Weberian legacy’, but not just from the perspective of Weber scholarship and research. Re-reading Bendix’s *Intellectual Portrait* is not going to break the hold of competing interpretations, nor will it finally exorcise Parsons’ theoretical reading through a complete ‘deparsonification’ of the Weberian legacy (Roth, 2007: 49). The task instead is to suggest a *genealogical counterhistory*, one that proposes a plurality of possible interpretations which only partly fit the conventional historical narratives of translation, reception, diffusion, adaptation and institutionalisation of Weber’s legacy in America. Scaff (2014) has recently constructed a marvellously intricate and ecumenical narrative of the Weberian legacy by searching for the common threads that run through so much of Weber-inspired research, scholarship and interpretation, while still recognising that the terms ‘Weberian’ or ‘neo-Weberian’ are deeply contentious and divisive, not just within ‘Weberism’ but also for those that might get stranded in the external boundary disputes with any number of ‘isms’ and their hybrids (e.g. Weberian Marxism, Analytical Weberianism). What holds these disparate coteries of Weberians together across their subject divides, disciplinary boundaries and cultural differences is not the ‘objective’ content of Weber’s work or the affirmation of a political value choice regarding its meaning, but rather the definition of the ‘intellectual commitments’ of Weberians. For Scaff, the Weberian legacy is not what Weber intended, it is the retrospective construction of all those who are inspired and influenced by his work. But this creates a dilemma: is there a coherent set of Weberian ‘intellectual commitments’ and can they be identified with a theory, paradigm, research programme, methodology, or are they bound up with something much broader, a philosophical perspective or intellectual tradition that goes beyond the confines of the social sciences (Scaff, 2014: 3, 170)? Compounding this issue, Weber’s texts are not authoritative guides to commitment, scholarly or political; they only catch his thought in flight, they confirm the complete incompleteness of his work and they open his oeuvre to endless misunderstandings and ‘creative misinterpretations’. The Weberian legacy is more a hermeneutical circle or spiral rather than a linear narrative, more about embracing differences and trying to make sense of them than defining enduring intellectual commitments, more a ‘genealogy of knowledges’, and a plurality of interpretations and ‘discursive practices’, rather than the reconstruction of a linear intellectual history. The exploration of the Weberian legacy therefore creates new discontinuities by opening up

spaces that will be filled by new disputes and new interpretations. Bendix's Weber as an interpretative artefact is part of this Weberian legacy as is the Parsonian Weber, and there are many other readings of Weber that deserve exploration. But Bendix's interpretation strives for authenticity and coherence; he wants to de-Americanise Weber by restoring the intellectual voice of the German Weber but within the humanist traditions of classic European liberalism. For those that thought the interpretative appropriation of the Weberian legacy would somehow secure the 'future of sociology' or transcend it, Bendix's historicist reading suggests that Weber's defence of the West may be an artefact of Western modernity. It is ultimately this virtue of ambivalence that turns the *Intellectual Portrait* into a 'classic' interpretation of Weber, and like all great interpretations of Weber it is not going to be eclipsed by cumulative advances of Weber scholarship.

## **The Weberian legacy: The origins of the *Intellectual Portrait***

Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait* was conceived partially in response to the limits of Parsons' authoritative imprint on Weber and the disparate legacy of Weber translations. He began seriously reading Weber (1947) in the late 1940s and it is perhaps no surprise he had written to Parsons shortly after the publication of *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* to enquire whether this was to be followed by further translations from *Economy and Society* (author communication with Bendix, 10 November 1982). Parsons' cordial reply was no. *Economy and Society* was being taught at graduate schools and more chapter translations were to eventually appear (e.g. Chapter 16, *The City*, 1958), but the posthumously 'complete' text was not to be available in translation until 1968. The diffuse translation process appears to have been a catalyst for Bendix's project, as it was for others, but his ambition was always broader (Roth, 2007: 42; Scaff, 2014: 15–16). C. Wright Mills (1960) lamented the inability of American scholarship to truly unravel Weber's legacy and he felt that Hans Gerth, his mentor, close friend and co-author, should do the job and perhaps finally slay the Parsonian Weber, the nemesis of his sociological imagination (p. 16). Mills (1960) was therefore deeply disappointed when he reviewed Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait*; it was not an intellectual biography but a 'collection of paraphrases' (p. 16). This was a familiar misunderstanding of Bendix's broader intentions, although ironically the reception of the *Intellectual Portrait* in Germany was much more positive (Roth, 1977b: 93). Bendix sought to provide a systematic exposition of Weber's work, but as 'a comprehensive whole' that was thematically coherent (Bendix, 1962: xix). If the first task was primarily 'expository', the second was to be achieved by making accessible the tremendous diversity and comparative range of Weber's analysis of 'the development of rationalism in Western civilisation' (Bendix, 1962: 9). In practice, exposition was translation and interpretation.

Parsons was, of course, also strongly committed to an analytical overview, and he may have gradually realised that Bendix's synthesising labours might undermine or at least partially decouple his own claims to carry forward and transcend Weber's sociological legacy (Parsons, 1972b: 202). It was undoubtedly these unifying concerns that helped fuel the recurrent sources of debate between both scholars (Parsons, 1972a: 766–768, 1972b: 200–203). Yet although they were both aware of their 'sharp theoretical differences', this did not generate a grand clash of viewpoints, for the sources of dispute were often presented through a whole array of substantive research interests that militated against the emergence of a systematic dialogue (Bendix, 1988:

133; Parsons, 1960: 750–752; Roth, 2007: 43). Nor was their professional correspondence extensive or close, except for a brief and illuminating exchange of letters during the lead-up to the politically charged Heidelberg conference in 1964, where they both stood shoulder to shoulder in defending Weber's scholarly integrity (Bendix Papers, Box 2, Folder 49). Yet Parsons was in a paradoxical sense the ever present, if often silent or 'absent interlocutor' in the shadow dialogue of Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait*. Indeed, Bendix was fully aware in retrospect that the historical self-image of Weber he wanted to create was deeply counter to Parsons' sociological Weber – perhaps it is very 'antithesis' (Bendix, 1988). Conversely, Parsons was 'annoyed' with the 'absolute antithesis' Bendix drew between Weber and Durkheim, perhaps because it was a surreptitious caricature of their own irreconcilable intellectual differences (Parsons, 1972b: 202).

Crucially, Bendix's substantive work was a direct challenge to the Weberian credentials of Parsonian-inspired modernisation theory which he felt was ahistorical and reductionist in its understanding of both Western development and the unique development patterns of non-Western societies and cultures. For Bendix, Weber's sophisticated historical sociology could not be fitted into the narrow framework of Parsons' evolutionary functionalism (Roth, 1977a: xiii). In particular, Bendix was perturbed by Parsons' detailed 86-page Introduction to *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (a three-chapter extract from Economy and Society)*. The Introduction indicated a significant shift in Parsons' work, as well as being a continuation of his critical reading of Weber: it marked the move from his early focus on Weber as a theorist of capitalism and a precursor of the 'voluntaristic theory of action' towards a 'structural functionalist' perspective that proposed a 'general theory of action' and 'system'. This 'new' critical reading of Weber was important not because it was 'true' or because it became institutionalised in some homogeneous or monolithic Parsonism, but because it coalesced around multiple and heterogeneous forms of 'functionalism', a term that Parsons believed best described a universal method rather than a school. Nonetheless, it was during this phase of his work that functional concepts became the touchstone for his theoretical critique of Weber. In the Introduction to *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, the word 'function' appeared with almost obsessive regularity in the critical evaluation of Weber's continuing significance for systematic sociological theory. Parsons argued that Weber's ideal type classifications were formulated in an ad hoc and fragmented manner, and as such, they could not provide the foundation for a systematic theory both of society and modernity. The essential concept in bridging the 'serious gaps' in Weber's work was, in Parsons' view, that of 'function' (Parsons, 1947: 24). His enthusiasm for functionalism as a theoretical leap forward was palpable. Only by understanding the functional nature of social relations could Weber (1947) have made the methodological link between his individual action categories and structural analysis; only by employing functional concepts could he have moved away from the individualising particularity of his historical analysis of 'the structural peculiarities of modern Western society ... And only, in turn, in so far as problems involving the behaviour of total systems are tackled, can certain levels of empirical generalisations be attained' (p. 24). Four years later, Parsons was to finally crystallise this critique with the publication of *The Social System* (1951). For Bendix, however, the sweeping claims of functionalism and systems theory regarding Western modernity were profoundly unsettling. As they gained institutional ascendancy during the 1950s, they threatened to eclipse those aspects of Weber's work that he most admired: Weber the great comparative historical sociologist of Western



politics and society who asked probing questions about the origins and direction of modernity.

## Images of society

Chapter VIII of Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait*, originally entitled 'Max Weber's Image of Society' (1960, first edition), was a wide-ranging, if indirect, response to the functional perspective. Here, Bendix outlined a Weberian image of society that he sometimes implicitly counterpoised to that of Parsons, and which he used recurrently in the *Intellectual Portrait* to create his own self-image of Weber's work. This was more than an expository concept for it contained the promise of a 'creative synthesis' (Hughes, 1961: 341). The idea was tentatively introduced in Chapter I (p. 9), further developed in Chapters II and IV and finally became a central theme of Chapters VIII and XII (Bendix, 1960). Bendix (1959a), however, had first indicated the implications of his approach in an essay co-authored with Bennet Berger, *Images of Society and the Problems of Concept Formation in Sociology*. Here, it was argued that sociological theories consist of a plurality of images of society that reflect the substantive interests and values of the interpreter. If we ignore these different interpretative viewpoints, we end up with 'pseudo-controversies' between competing schools. Reflecting on this essay almost 30 years later, Bendix (1988) suggested that Parsons had not addressed the intrinsic nature of the theoretical conflicts between competing schools, instead he had tried to eliminate these conflicts: 'But this work of integration is based on yet another interpretation of society. In this case the definition of the "social fact" is derived from the belief that the concept "system" is indispensable for a scientific theory of society' (p. 133). In Bendix's (1988) view, there was an alternative to the idea of society as system: 'My emphasis is on another image of society, an impulse of viewing the social worlds which facilitates the perception of common themes in many theories without attempting to replace that multiplicity with any one unified theory' (p. 111). This nominalist plea for intellectual moderation and theoretical eclecticism was at the heart of Bendix's (1988) comparative studies and his reading of Weber: 'This image of society is the theoretical counterpart of comparative analysis' (p. 125).

Despite Bendix's defence of theoretical eclecticism as an ideal founded on the comparative historian's research practice, he found that his reading of Weber was constantly drawn into the 'bifurcation of schools', a danger that we now know is inherent in the generational conflicts between academic disciplines and sub-disciplines (Abbott, 2001). The disparate legacy of translation and the desire by some Parsonians to institutionalise and appropriate a Parsonian Weber as a representative of structural-functionalism and modernisation theory compounded these issues (Almond, 1956, 2007). Bendix (1962) was a reluctant participant in these fractural disputes, partly because he remained acutely aware that Weber's intellectual legacy could 'not be summarised or vulgarised so easily' (p. 460). Certainly, Bendix's own intellectual position has proved difficult to categorise; even Parsons, the master of classifications, had difficulty here. In his review of the *Intellectual Portrait*, he appeared to withhold classification, although he was clearly concerned with Bendix's emphasis on 'interests' rather than 'values' in his overall reading of Weber. However, in a review of one of Bendix's later works, *Embattled Reason*, he described Bendix as 'self-consciously a certain type of Weberian' who was 'no naive rationalist of the Enlightenment persuasion' (Parsons, 1972a: 767). Rather than amplify this characterisation in relation to Bendix's historicist critique of 'scientism' and his search for an 'intermediate

position' between rationalism and 'sociological reductionism', Parsons proceeded to position Bendix mainly in opposition to his own idea of society as a social system and his later reading of Weber as an evolutionary theorist (Bendix, 1962: 474; Parsons, 1972a: 767).

Notwithstanding the difficulty of classification, there was in fact a strong degree of internal consistency to Bendix's intellectual self-identity, both as a 'cultural Weberian' and comparative historical sociologist of politics *and* society (Caldwell, 2002). If not always obvious in his substantive work, the two aspects of Bendix's intellectual imagination were invariably connected in his reading of Weber. As Chapter VIII of his *Intellectual Portrait* (1960) explored Weber's image of society in relation to his sociology of religion, the concluding section of the second edition (Bendix, 1962), Chapter XV, related this image to Weber's political sociology. But this synthetic task had a broader purpose. Bendix (1962) wanted to 'round out' Weber's place in 'the context of European intellectual history' and its 'liberal tradition' (p. xxv). This was an unfinished task that Parsons, in his review of the first edition of the *Intellectual Portrait*, suggested that Bendix might wish to follow-up at a later stage, although he may not have expected the outcome. Bendix (1962) enthusiastically took up the challenge, partly because it was already implicit in his apparently purely 'expository' review (p. xxiv). He located Weber's corpus in a wide-ranging intellectual tradition that drew its inspiration from German historicism and humanism, and which included such luminaries of European intellectual history as Jacob Burckhardt and Alexis de Tocqueville, aristocratic and realist liberals who expressed foreboding regarding Enlightenment rationalism and the future of modern society (1962: 462, 1965a). This curiously eclectic intellectual tradition was defined by a comparative historical imagination that sought 'to discover the genesis of historical configurations' and to defend the values and cultural ideals of Western civilisation. By connecting this intellectual genealogy to an alternative image of society in the *Intellectual Portrait*, Bendix was expressing not only an inner affinity between his own work and his self-image of Weber's legacy but also implicitly challenging Parsons' alternative reading.

## **Interests and ideals: Weber's 'cryptic remark'**

The central clue to Bendix's attempt to reconstruct Weber's image of society in the *Intellectual Portrait* was Weber's famous 'cryptic remark' that 'Not ideas, but material and ideal interests directly govern men's conduct'. Unlike many interpreters, Bendix had taken this claim seriously, and he rejected the characterisation of Weber as an idealist (Tenbruck, 1980: 333). It was, however, Weber's (1946) conditional proposition that made his statement about ideas and interests so problematic: 'Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest' (p. 280). Parsons had summarised this position in *The Structure of Social Action*: 'Ideas are effective in action because they determine the direction of practical activity in which the interests can be pursued' (Parsons, 1937 [1968]: 572). This was not a 'misreading', but Parsons' overall interpretation of Weber's work often emphasised the primacy of ideas *before* interests. In contrast, Bendix appeared to reverse this emphasis, while arguing for the 'relative autonomy' of ideas and intellectual worldviews. In his view,

Weber transformed the great insight of Marx by showing that material interests are linked to man's inveterate quest for meaning and idealisation ... But Weber gave to human ideas and ideals as much weight as he did to economic interests, so that for him the drive for power or material success was always the starting point for an analysis of ideas. (Bendix, 1962: 481)

It is this 'double emphasis' or 'balanced emphasis on interests *and* ideas' that Bendix partially unravelled when he argued that 'according to Weber, material without ideal interests are empty, ideals without material interests are impotent' (1962: 46–47, 1965a: 177, 1978: 17). The dynamics of these subtle, shifting and complex interrelations could only be unravelled by the historian's practice – not by a theoretical supposition about the primacy of ideas over interests or material over ideal factors (Schluchter, 1996: 226). Those who had, therefore, elevated Weber's heuristic principles of comparative analysis into an argument for idealism over materialism had fundamentally misunderstood Weber's epistemological practice. Weber's 'cryptic remark' was not a *theory* of social change or a formula for 'general explanations' in Bendix's judgement, but rather an invitation to probe the practical interrelationships and eventuations of interests *and* ideas through comparative historical investigation.

For Bendix, the dual perspective on 'interests' and their relation to the dynamic of religious ideas and political power was at the heart of Weber's work. Weber's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Bendix (1962) argued, 'conceived of society as an arena of competing status groups each with its own economic interests, status honour, and orientation toward the world and man' (p. 262). By analysing these groups and their material and ideal interests, the motivational impact of religious ideas on social conduct would become understandable: 'The world view of the great world religions was the work of clearly identifiable social groups: the Puritan divines, the Confucian scholars, the Hindu Brahmins, and the Jewish Levites and prophets' (1962: 258). In contrast, Bendix (1962) argued that *Economy and Society* extended this analysis by exploring the dynamic of interests in relation to political power, authority and legitimacy: 'that allocates the right to command and the duty to obey' (p. 290). These 'two perspectives' were often combined in Weber's historical analysis, although Bendix believed that Weber's sociology of religion primarily analysed 'constellations of interests' in relation to worldviews or ideas, while his political sociology primarily analysed interests in relation to 'types of domination' (Bendix, 1962: 47, 289, ft9; 1970: 152–153). Running through both, however, was the overarching idea of the 'irreconcilable' struggles and conflicts over cultural values, religious beliefs, political ideals and economic interests that was 'at the core of Max Weber's personal and intellectual outlook' (Bendix, 1962: 263).

Bendix used this reading of Weber in the *Intellectual Portrait* to counter Parsons' *sociological* view of the nature of social order (Bendix, 1962: 286–288). Parsons (1937 [1968]) was acutely aware of this difference of perspective which echoed Weber's 'tragic consciousness of the importance of coercion in human affairs' (p. 658). He argued in his review of the *Intellectual Portrait* that Weber moved from the theoretical analysis of individual social action to a concept of 'legitimate order' founded on the 'normative control of interests' because 'Problems of order, as distinguished from those of categories of "interest" that define the primary subject-matter of economics and politics, thus constitute the core of sociological concern' (Parsons, 1960: 174). And he directly criticised Bendix (1962) for overemphasising the '*analytical* dichotomy' in Weber's work between the 'material' factors associated with domination and power and the 'ideal' factors, norms and values, associated with legitimation:

I do not believe that, either in his treatment of political problems or of the sociology of religion, Bendix does full justice to the extent to which Weber achieved an integration of the two sets of factors in a single coherent theoretical scheme. (p. 752)

Bendix, of course, rejected the idea of a single theoretical scheme and its corollary, a universal and functional concept of 'society' as a regulative or normative ideal of modernity. He argued that Weber's methodological writings avoided 'sociological reductionism' by linking the idea of interpretative understanding to the dynamics and contingencies of social and political action, rather than to any holistic concept of society or the state. In these terms, Weber located the culturally significant problematic of the modern Western social and political order within two distinct analytical domains: 'society' and the 'polity', each of which can be explored historically in terms of 'constellation of interests' and 'types of domination' (Bendix, 1962: 287). Bendix (1962) also argued that social order is possible because it is based on both interests and ideas and a 'belief in legitimacy' (p. 288). In this sense, Bendix's historicist and realist reinstatement of 'legitimacy' is crucial in the reciprocal understanding of the state–society relationship, a decisive factor that had been underplayed by functionalism and 'instrumental Weberism' (Anter 2014:52-53). Western societies have maintained some degree of social cohesion and interdependence by creating and sustaining shared ideals, values and beliefs and by institutionalising a framework for regulating economic exchange and instrumental market relationships. In contrast, the state may maintain 'legitimate order' by a combination of power, coercion, authority, cultural values and enduring institutional practices.

With this reformulation, Bendix opened up Weber's realistic and often disturbing analysis of the political dynamics of modernity. By analysing 'domination combined with administration' and legitimacy as the legal enactment of domination, Bendix (1962) argued that Weber avoided any 'idealisation' or utopian vision of modern society, of the state or the nation as realms in which social values, norms, moral standards and political ideals are in harmony, or are likely to be in the future (pp. 262, 286). There can be no conflation of modern society with the nation *or* the state; for society is a precarious entity, and the nation and the state are rarely identical. Nor can 'modern society' as a normative ideal define the contingent outcomes of political modernity in Western or non-Western societies (Chernilo, 2007). In this way, Bendix replaced the Parsonian *sociological* problem of order in which politics is encompassed by society with a characteristically Weberian problematic in which the political analysis of power and legitimacy cannot fully account for the enduring nature of social order, and, conversely, the sociological analysis of interests, ideas and values cannot fully account for the enduring nature of politics and government (Bendix, 1988: 277, ft48, 49). At the core of modern capitalist society is a marketplace dominated by conflicting instrumental interests that cannot be resolved. At the core of the modern nation *and* state is a form of legal domination founded on the 'insolvable conflict between the formal and substantive rationality of law' (Bendix, 1962: 484).

Bendix (1983a) was also to carry his essentially historical objections to functionalist conceptions of society to the theoretical core of this perspective: the linkage of 'function' and 'purpose' (pp. 132–133). If function and purpose are conflated, then one is almost inevitably driven towards evolutionary and teleological modes of explanation in which the increasing 'structural differentiation' between the parts of the social system serves the 'needs' of the system as a whole: differentiation carries the evolutionary assumption that 'society' serves functional purposes (Bendix, 1953: 13).

Worse still, for Bendix the functional emphasis on ‘why’ social systems exist was replacing the historical sociological analysis of ‘how’ social changes occur: the detailed historical explanation of the origins, causes and divergent outcomes of modernity was being lost in the abstract universal functionality of system needs or imperatives (Whimster, 2007: 191–192). Ultimately, functionalism appeared as an ahistorical, inherently circular and deductive mode of analysis devoid of real explanatory insight (Bendix, 1953: 7–16, 1970: 150–154).

## Weber’s ‘central’ texts

With his two-sided formulation of the state–society relationship in the *Intellectual Portrait*, Bendix gave the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* and *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* equal weight in his overall interpretation of Weber’s work, a balance that was decisive in his recovery of Weber’s political sociology. The importance of this balanced interpretative stance towards Weber’s work is often forgotten or misinterpreted. Characteristically, Parsons in his early readings of Weber focused primarily on *The Protestant Ethic* and the studies of the world religions, rather than on the equally important sociology of bureaucracy, politics, law and domination that occupied a core position within the diffuse typological frameworks of *Economy and Society* (Cohen et al., 1975: 237). A brief glance at the four chapters of *The Structure of Social Action* concerned with Weber’s work reveals that only one chapter sub-section is focused on political analysis, while two complete chapters examine the sociology of religion (Cohen et al., 1975: 237). This allocation of space seems somewhat inappropriate, especially given the vital theoretical location and quantitative extent of the sociology of domination in *Economy and Society*. Indeed, Roth (1978) has suggested that these concerns define the ‘central theme’ of the work (p. lxxxviii). Parsons’ reluctance, even in his later writings, to provide a sustained interpretation of *Economy and Society*, with the notable exception of a pioneering discussion of Weber’s ‘economic sociology’, seriously undermined his claim to provide a systematic overview of Weber’s theoretical corpus (Alexander, 1983: 20–21; Parsons, 1947: 30–55).

Interestingly, Bendix who has often been closely associated with an ‘instrumental’ and ‘exaggerated’ emphasis on domination and conflict in Weber’s political sociology also made *The Protestant Ethic* and the comparative studies of the world religions a pervasive element in his general overview of Weber’s work (Kalberg, 1997: 210). In Bendix’s (1962) view, Weber undertook the comparative study of the world religions to establish ‘what was distinctive for the West by a comparison of the causes and consequences of religious beliefs in different civilizations’ (p. 84). In his concise exposition of Weber’s monograph on *Ancient Judaism*, he also provided a powerful affirmation of the power of religious ideas and interests in defining the differentiation between Occidental and Oriental religiosity which appeared so fateful for the ‘moral rationalism of Western civilisation’ (1962: 256, 279). In this respect, Bendix (1962) never lost sight of Weber’s emphasis on the role of religious ideas and beliefs in his ‘analysis of the manifold relations between man’s ideal and material interests’, although he was often critical of the way in which Weber ‘inadvertently obscured’ the actual impact of ideas on practical conduct (pp. 13, 275–276). Indeed, Bendix even went so far as to emphasise that almost all of Weber’s later writings on law, politics

and economics were 'continuations of the sociology of religion', a view that may be questioned given the chronological sequencing, analytical disjunctions and overlapping themes of Weber's writings on religion (Whimster, 2007). However, Bendix (1962) was equally sweeping in his emphasis on the political exploration of domination and legitimacy in *Economy and Society*, which he considered to be Weber's most 'systematic work' (p. 473). He therefore observed of Weber's concerns that 'In conception and scope his political analysis stands on a par with his sociology of religion', although again Bendix was less than convincing in providing a chronological rationale for this viewpoint' (Mommson, 2000; Whimster, 2007). Nevertheless, his generally even-handed textual approach was inclusive in its broad approach to Weber's substantive work – at least that which was widely available at that time.

It was, however, Bendix's focus on *Economy and Society*, and his essentially Weberian view of political power as the product of the irreducible conflicts between divergent group interests, that undoubtedly helped to define his profound distance from Parsons' later functionalist reading of Weber (Whimster, 2007: 232). Parsons appeared reluctant to view power in relation to 'interests' and its corollary, the legitimization of power by 'ideology'. Power appeared to be by definition 'legitimate', for it was conceived as the extension of a pre-given consensus that arose from the primacy of a social system of shared values: the state is within society. It may have been this normative *sociological* view that led Parsons to the controversial translation of *Herrschaft* (domination or ruleship) as 'imperative coordination', a translation that Bendix ultimately objected to on the grounds of the autonomous role of politics in Weber's typological schemata of domination and legitimacy (Bendix, 1962: 292, ft16; Parsons, 1960: 752, 1975: 669–672). For Weber, politics was inseparable from 'the domination of man over man' exercised through 'legitimate domination', and, in so far as legitimacy sought to explain, justify and maintain the existing power relations and inequalities, it was potentially a form of ideology. Although Weber refused to embrace a reductionist concept of ideology (i.e. religious worldviews are not reducible to social power), he was constantly aware of how legitimacy occurs through interests, beliefs and ideas (Whimster, 2007: 230). Parsons believed, however, that he could somehow overcome the constituent interests that underpinned the moral and ideological framework of free market capitalism with a normative image of 'modern society' conceived as social system of shared values. In Bendix's (1988) view, this was just as profoundly misguided as the once radical bourgeoisie idea of a civil society in which property and equality were compatible (p. 149).

## **Discussion: The intellectual self-portrait of a Weberian**

Bendix's efforts in the *Intellectual Portrait* to free Weber's political sociology from the legacy of functionalism and return it to the domain of politics, power and the state have proved in the long run to be remarkably successful (Anter 2014; Chernilo, 2007; Collins, 1998). By exploring the partly autonomous realms of the society–state relationship, Bendix (1964) had reinstated the role of politics in understating the dynamics of state formation and modernisation:

In the societies of Western civilisation we should ... accept the existence of a hiatus between the forces making for social solidarity or conflict independently of government and the forces accounting for the continuous exercise of authority in the national community. (p. 169)

*Nation Building and Citizenship* (1964) was a testimony to how illuminating this Weberian informed mode of analysis could be in practice (Barbalet, 2010). Bendix (1988) primarily explored the differences between medieval and modern political patterns of authority and how the 'democratic revolutions' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries turned subjects into citizens (p. 279). In this respect, Bendix's emphasis on the interaction between states and civil societies in the formation of new national political communities searching for modernity can be seen as a continuation of Weber's work as well as a corrective to the conventional overemphasis on the Protestant ethic thesis (Bendix, 1968: 8; Collins, 1986: 39–44). Certainly, the emphasis on state power was a recurrent theme in almost all of Bendix's work, and it lent a hard instrumental realism to his Weberian reading of politics and power.

The focus on the state or power as a 'model' of political analysis and social change should not, however, be overstated; especially given the diffuse comparative dimensions of Bendix's work and his explicit disavowal of theoretical generalisations, including modernisation theories (Bendix, 1967; 1996). Although the issues of state power and legitimacy are pervasive thematics in the *Intellectual Portrait* that are further developed in his substantive studies of *Nation-Building and Citizenship*, and *Kings or People*, Bendix's historical time-frame, varied intellectual interests, eclectic choice of cases and shifting comparative narratives wilfully defy any hopes of creating theoretical models or 'bold generalisations' regarding the dynamics of economic and political modernity. Moreover, by affirming contingency over necessity in his historical sociology, Bendix was a forceful critic of 'methodological nationalism': how nations and 'modern' states emerged in the West was a contingent outcome and this was likely to be the historical experience of non-Western societies (Chernilo, 2007). This explains why the case studies chosen in Bendix's comparative studies, both Western and non-Western, were an affirmation of particularity and cultural variation, rather than an exploration of how developmental pathways might be convergent, parallel or repeatable (Ringer, 1997: 91, 152). For Bendix, the dynamics between state and society and citizenship and democratisation in the West constituted a 'singular historical breakthrough' to modernity that cannot be repeated or replicated by follower societies: each new path to industrial development and democratisation is unique: there are 'multiple modernities' (Bendix, 1964: 410–411; Collins, 1986: 34–35). If Weber left us without an answer to the peculiar 'origins' of Western modernity and its 'uniqueness' (was it a concatenation of contingent events?), Bendix leaves us with no answers as to the future of modernities in non-Western societies.

Positioning Weber's legacy as interpreted by Bendix in the context of a political sociology of the state, an ideal of 'Weberian sociological theory', or a concept of 'political modernity' is equally problematic (Chernilo, 2007; Collins, 1998). The *Intellectual Portrait* did not seek to provide a *theoretical* overview of Weber's work; there was no systematic effort to develop an alternative to the functionalist viewpoint or modernisation theory (Kalberg, 1997). Nor did he envisage the search for a synthesis of social order and conflict, worldviews and interests. Instead, Bendix (1962) emphasised how Weber sub-divided his concepts and typologies into 'manageable' units of comparative analysis that could be applied to specific historical issues or particular cases (pp. 276–277). In addition, his overall reading of Weber's analysis of the relationship between state and society as a precarious balance between opposing counter-forces or 'hypothetical extremes' of 'societal tendencies of action' (*Vergesellschaftung*) is still powerful and provocative, and it is congruent with more recent Weber scholarship concerned with translating Weber's action categories into

macro-social analysis (Kalberg, 2012). More generally, Bendix's reading of Weber's work in the *Intellectual Portrait* is compatible with a shift towards a plurality of theoretical models that no longer begin with the search for a general theory of society, economy or a singular ideal of political modernity (Chernilo, 2008; Eisenstadt, 1998, 2003). He followed Weber's nominalist disaggregation of society into separate spheres or domains not to defend a realm of individual freedom in the face of the 'iron cage' of inexorable bureaucratic rationalisation that Weber feared, but to partly expose the inequalities that characterised the social world and power relations within societies that sought to pursue democratic pathways. In this sense, he partly reaffirmed Weber's realism without fully embracing the 'brutality and romance' of his political pessimism: the fate of the 'West' and political modernity in non-Western societies are partly decoupled (Bendix, 1962: 9).

Undoubtedly, Bendix's consistent reluctance to fully explore the more systematic theoretical aspects of Weber's work, and especially the 'developmental' typologies of *Economy and Society*, can be partly explained by his plea for theoretical eclecticism as the reference point for his comparative method (Bendix, 1962: 326). But perhaps, more importantly, it was deeply connected with the all-embracing portrait of Weber, the comparative historical sociologist that Bendix wished to create as the self-image of his own intellectual enterprise. Above all, Bendix extolled the virtues of historical self-consciousness in understating the uniqueness of Western social and political institutions and the particularity and comparative richness of each case study of political modernity. For Bendix, the origins of modernity in the West were as diverse and complex as the possibilities of political modernity in non-Western societies. Weber had in Bendix's (1962) judgement been acutely aware of this dilemma: 'He was especially concerned with the possibility that his study of legal domination and of ethical rationalism would be mistaken for a partisan defence of rationality and Western civilization' (p. 388). Emulating this concern, Bendix made no attempt in his own comparative studies to subsume cases under a theoretical framework or set of developmental propositions (Bendix, 1956, 1963, 1987). And unlike some variants of neo-Weberian historical sociology, Bendix consistently refused to imbue the political with a hard instrumental efficacy or explanatory primacy (Collins, 1986: 145–150; Mann, 1986: 30). Tellingly, it was Parsons (1960) in his review of the *Intellectual Portrait* who complemented Bendix on the way he dealt with the complex interpenetration of 'cultural and social phenomena' in the presentation of Weber's political sociology (p. 751). Parsons was right. Bendix was a 'cultural Weberian', but without sharing Parsons' positive political vision of 'modern society' as a universal ideal with an evolutionary destiny. Instead, Bendix emphasised the historicist underpinnings of Weber's typological enterprise to such an extent that even the hint of a 'theory' or development scheme of large-scale political change, state-and-nation formation or geopolitical conflict was consciously disaggregated and returned to the particularity of historical evidence (Chernilo, 2007: 109; Mann, 1993: 44–89; Schluchter, 1981: 86). The emphatic statement at the conclusion of his review of Weber's concept of 'traditional domination' in the *Intellectual Portrait* expressed a characteristic statement of intent and an attitude towards developmental ideas: 'The foregoing analysis is typological, not developmental' (Bendix, 1962: 381). Similarly, most of Bendix's mild and empathetic criticisms of Weber's typology of domination and his 'overemphasis' on bureaucratisation focused on the historical utility and limits of his concepts, rather than issues of the broader theoretical coherence of his work (Kalberg, 2012). Indeed, Bendix (1964) did not hesitate to historically relativise the



heuristic value of 'Weber's categoric distinction between legitimate authority and constellations of interests' by questioning its ethnocentric origins in an understanding of Western political institutions (p. 28). It was the historical richness and delimited comparative dimensions of Weber's writings on domination, power and legitimacy that were most prized: 'The value of Weber's analysis lies in its problem orientation and in the clarification of historical materials' (Bendix, 1962: 326). Ultimately, Bendix's recovery of Weber's political sociology in the *Intellectual Portrait* was subsumed by his wide-ranging reinterpretation of the scope, significance and limitations of Weber's comparative historical exploration of the origins and uniqueness of Western society.

If the *Intellectual Portrait* succeeded in repositioning and redefining Weber's legacy as a comparative historical sociologist, this was achieved with some important critical limitations. Unlike *The Structure of Social Action*, which enthusiastically embraced Weber's apparently 'central methodological concern' with vindicating the universal applicability of 'general theoretical concepts' in the socio-historical sciences (Parsons, 1937 [1968]: 640, 1965: 173), the *Intellectual Portrait* deliberately refrained from examining Weber's voluminous methodological writings (some 600 pages) in any detail (Bendix, 1962: xxiii, 280). This was a judicious and pragmatic decision, especially given the substantive scope of Bendix's task, and the notoriously inconsistent, disjointed and often obtuse nature of Weber's methodological writings (Whimster, 2007: 49). It had, however, much broader interpretative implications. Bendix's limited discussion of method tended to accentuate the particularity of Weber's historical exposition, and this obviated against a more general appraisal of the analytical or theoretical frameworks of his writings (Kalberg, 2012). He modestly described his overall task of presenting Weber's fragmented and difficult writings as 'an effort to reorganise, to eliminate digressions and details, to omit whole parts where these detract from the main line of argument, and to put together materials when they belong to the same context, regardless of where they appeared originally' (Bendix, 1962: xxiv). This act of concision tended, however, to create principally a narrative order in the presentation of 'an intricate web of related themes', rather than a formal or *analytical* cohesiveness in the interpretation of Weber's ideas (Bendix, 1962: 84). Bendix's thematic approach also allowed him to skip over the chronological discontinuities of Weber's work and the disjunctions and shifting focus of his research interests. In this way, the equivocations and disjunctions in Weber's historical analysis could be seen as essentially products of the historians' shifting and eclectic utilisation of concepts, rather than the outcome of confusing intellectual intentions or perhaps theoretical failures (Caldwell, 2002: 43–45; Parsons, 1937: 601–610). Certainly, Bendix's reading appeared to limit the possibility that Weber's causal analytical understanding of history might be integral to his comparative method (Ringer, 1997: 161–162). For Bendix (1962), causal analysis was 'only one of several problems' that Weber explored in his comparative studies (p. 84). Indeed, Bendix's consistent fidelity to a self-conception of Weber's intellectual enterprise as one defined by historical particularity invariably undermined the validity of any claim to treat Weber as a 'rigorous sociological theorist' concerned with causal propositions and generalisations – however daunting it might be to sustain this claim in the face of Weber's fragmented, confusing and incomplete legacy.

Finally, no evaluation of Bendix's legacy as an interpreter of Weber's work would be complete without commenting on the absence in the *Intellectual Portrait* of any systematic discussion of Weber's political values and ideals, or the broader significance of his occasional political writings. Like the omission of a discussion of

Weber's methodology, this revealed more than a pragmatic drawing of manageable boundaries in documenting Weber's substantive historical corpus. Bendix's *Intellectual Portrait* was published just after the publication in Germany of Wolfgang Mommsen's controversial study *Max Weber and German Politics 1890–1920* (1984 [1959]). No two books could be more different. Mommsen offered a sustained and often brilliant interrogation of Weber's nationalist political ideals, and he questioned his enduring legacy for a post-war generation trying to come to terms with the catastrophe of fascism. This was counterhistory as the critique of ideology and a polemical corrective to liberal hagiography. The 'fallacy' of Weber, the objective-minded sociologist and potential founding father of a modern German liberal political tradition, was counterposed to a devastatingly critical image of Weber as a disillusioned 'liberal imperialist' locked in a heroic and futile struggle against the stultifying bureaucratic institutions of imperial Germany.

Bendix was perplexed with this singular reading of Weber as a strident German nationalist (Bendix, 1962: ft2, 471; Roth, 2007: 45). In the *Intellectual Portrait*, he warned the reader that the overemphasis on the historically conditioned nature of Weber's scholarly writings and his 'frequently crude German nationalism' might detract from an understanding and utilisation of Weber's enduring intellectual achievement (Bendix, 1962: 10). For Bendix (1962), 'Weber also combined this nationalism with a fundamental commitment to the study of non-European cultures whose basic assumptions made sense and had value in their own terms' (p. 10). Yet paradoxically, it was by this very separation between work and person, scholarship and partisanship, between Western and non-Western rationalism, that a liberal self-image of Weber's work entered pervasively, if indirectly, into Bendix's interpretation. For it was through the very imposing fabric and subtlety of his historical exposition that one can discern the traces of a gentle and sober 'intellectual portrait' of Weber as a scholar of enormous erudition, extraordinary comparative insights and exemplary scientific integrity – the historian of Western culture, society and politics *par excellence*. It was through this integral portrayal, which placed Weber unambiguously within 'the intellectual heritage of European liberalism', rather than simply German cultural traditions, that Bendix (1960) attempted 'to bring to the fore the thematic coherence of Weber's sociological work, which arises from this liberal tradition' (p. xxiv).

In retrospect, this was one area in which Parsons and Bendix, despite their many differences, appeared to be in broad agreement (Parsons, 1972a: 767, 1972b: 201). Parsons had written to Bendix before the now famous Heidelberg conference in April 1964 to express his disappointment with the highly critical contributions of Raymond Aron and Herbert Marcuse, which made him realise that he would be 'something of a Daniel in the Lion's den' (Bendix papers, letter, 6 April 1964). Bendix wrote back expressing his fear that Weber would become 'a whipping-boy of the unresolved intellectual legacies of Germany for the last half century' (Bendix papers, letter, 9 April 1964). At that moment, Parsons and Bendix were in agreement. For they both viewed Weber's controversial plea for 'value neutrality' as a liberal defence of the institutions of science and learning in the face of sectarian modes of political irrationality and value conflict (Gerhardt, 2011; Roth, 2007). But the issues went far beyond scholarship. In the volatile context of counter-cultural politics, student radicalism and New Left ideas, academic liberalism and the Weberian sociological corpus were increasingly identified with the emergence of an 'iron cage' of 'totalitarian bureaucracy' and a 'one-dimensional' society. From this perspective, Parsons' and Bendix's readings of Weber were often lumped together as the twin theoretical apologetics for the identification of

'Western reason' with the triumph of capitalism and the domination of scientism. Parsons and Bendix certainly shared deep affinities in their 'liberal' defence of Weber, scientific objectivity and the university against the utopian ethics of Marcuse's 'Great Refusal' (Bendix 1971). But Parsons and Bendix were very different liberals, although this did not seem to matter for those who wanted to redefine the politics of scholarship. Parsons' liberal idealism and Bendix's liberal realism were simply treated as the Janus faced expression of academic conservatism. This rhetorical elision of the meaning of the word 'liberal' illustrates once again just how difficult it is to evaluate the integrity of Bendix's reading of Weber in isolation from Parsons, both Parsons the sociological theorist and Parsons the inspiration for an American ideal of universal modernity. With the passage of time, however, Bendix's reading of Weber can now be more clearly defined in its own terms. Unlike Parsons, who appeared to 'supersede' Weber's disenchanted and instrumental politics of liberalism with a normative and modernist sociological vision of moral progress, rationality and social order, Bendix related Weber's enduring legacy to a more stoical, historicist and realist reading of Western history: to Weber's anti-utopian vision of a future characterised by moral relativism, 'embattled reason' and the ever present spectre of authoritarian politics (Bendix, 1962: 466, 1984: 19, 1986: 280). Weber may not, in Bendix's (1962) judgement, have anticipated the grim totalitarian ideologies of national socialism or soviet communism, but his historical analysis of the potential subversion of democracy by bureaucracy, of individual freedom by political power, of politics by utopian ethics was 'a testimony to his genius' (pp. 466–468). For Bendix (1983b), Weber the comparative historian and Weber the anti-utopian defender of reason and individual freedom were inseparable. Fused together within his exposition of Weber's comparative research, Bendix (1960) could create his own inspirational self-image of Weber's work and affirm in the very final sentence of his *Intellectual Portrait* the moral and liberal mission of historical scholarship: 'Weber's life work appears, as he conceived it, as an analysis and defence of Western civilisation' (p. 494).

## Conclusion

By revisiting Bendix's *intellectual Portrait* of Weber, we may gain a greater understanding of the genealogy of the 'field' of Weber scholarship and interpretation, of a genealogical counterhistory that questions Parsons' reading while still retaining what Bendix most admired, the cultural capital that is Max Weber: the heroic liberal conscience of reason and individual freedom in the disenchantment world of Western modernity. To some extent, this is still what Weber means to many Weberians (Scaff, 2014). Re-reading the *Intellectual Portrait*, therefore, has a ritual function; it allows us to think of what may bind 'Weberians' together, or what an authentic Weberian interpretation of Weber might look like (Ringer, 2004; Scaff, 2014). Of course, since the publication of the *Intellectual Portrait*, the textual legacy of Weber's oeuvre has become much more secure, so there are unlikely to be any major new surprises. But Weber's interpretive legacy is more than a list of his classic texts, if we could ever decide what they are, for they seem to be constantly subject to reinterpretation. The final completion of the *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe* is unlikely to change that (Whimster, 2012). The uncomfortable truth is that Weber's legacy is constructed by his interpreters; for 'misinterpretations' and the constant search for new or more authentic readings is what determines Weber's continuing significance, especially for those who believe that we still live in 'the age of Weber'. This is partly why the endless

controversies over what constitutes Weber's oeuvre or Weber's central texts will continue within the hermeneutic of Weber scholarship (Chalcraft et al., 2008). While Weber scholarship has certainly made great advances, and the possibility of a divide between 'older Weber studies' and 'new Weber studies' is a useful heuristic in partly defining the 'modernist' legacy of Parsons and Bendix, there is no sense in which one reading simply supersedes another in some *cumulative* process (Chalcraft et al., 2008: 19). The Weberians may have 'won' in their textual re-reading of Weber over the last few decades, but Weber's influence on Parsons and the legacy of Parsonism as well as the possibilities of 're-Parsonising' Weber are still very much alive (Gerhardt, 2011; Habermas, 1984; Schluchter, 1981; Stone, 2010). This suggests that any attempt to classify the authenticity of a Weberian reading may be somewhat futile; there are almost as many Webers as there are interpreters of his work. And if there was a 'real Weber' before Weber interpretation, his legacy has so far proved elusive. Nevertheless, by reviewing classic interpretations of Weber, or by constantly exploring the cultural genealogy of Weber scholarship through new insights and interpretations, we may be able to ask whether there is an emerging 'canon' of Weber interpretation, and most importantly who is included and excluded? If Bendix deserves an honourable place, or a simple plaque in the halls of Weber-inspired comparative historical sociology, it is because each reading of Weber has a context. Weber mattered to Bendix, not just because Bendix looked back to the fading hopes of Enlightenment rationalism or the catastrophe of Nazi Germany as a Jewish émigré, but because he also looked towards the still problematic future of a world of multiple modernities. Unfortunately, Bendix knew only too well that while Weber asked the most searching questions about the origins and uniqueness of Western rationalism, he had few answers as to the fate of modernity for the West or the rest of the world. In the end, the fate of the West as an idea may determine what constitutes the Weberian legacy.

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